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The Man Behind the Mask

Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury, the True and Only Author of the Some Thirty-Seven Plays and Poems Now Credited to one William Shakspere, of Stratford-on-Avon, England.

ALSO THE AUTHOR OF A VAST AMOUNT OF OTHER WRITINGS GIVEN TO THE WORLD UNDER VARIOUS LITERARY ALIASES.

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THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

The three-hundred-year search is now ended. The true author of the some thirty-seven plays and divers poems credited to one William Shakespere, of Stratford-on-Avon, England, is Robert Cecil, first Earl of Salisbury and Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1598 to 1612, though he had practically been Prime Minister from the time he entered the Foreign Office in 1590, this being due to the fact that his father, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Prime Minister for forty years under Elizabeth, was seventy years of age and practically retired when Robert entered the office.

Robert Cecil, born a poet, was designed to be and reared by his father as a courtier, to succeed him in office. The work was not in its chief aspect agreeable to Robert, but there was no future for him those days in becoming openly a playwright and poet. He could not be Prime Minister, could not continue in his father's graces, and at the same time be a writer of the drama. But that which he could not do openly he did secretly, and he wrote a vast volume of matter not only under the name of Shakespere, but of John Lylly, Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Davies of Hereford, King James I, Samuel Daniel, and a host of other aliases—all he asked was the privilege to hang his effusions upon somebody's name. And so it went on for twenty years and more.

Cecil was the life-long friend of Southampton, and for that reason dedicated his "Venus and Adonis" to him, "the first heir of his invention"; later the "Rape of Lucrece" also to Southampton. Cecil, Southampton, and Shakespere rep-

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resenting the theater, divided the money three ways, from the plays produced under the name of Shakespere. Shakespere of Stratford, an uneducated man, but with a strong money sense, was simply the business manager. The mix-up that came between Shakespere and Cecil had a curious origin. When Cecil began writing, previous to Shakespere's arrival in London, he, if not immediately, very shortly began signing his writings "W. S." These, too, were the initials of Shakespere of Stratford, but they also were the legitimate initials of Cecil, for originally the name of Cecil was spelled Syssel, from the Welsh, and there was some objection on the part of Burghley's sons, Thomas and Robert, to the change in spelling initiated by Burghley. Robert evidently preferred the old way of spelling the name. "Will" was the family name of the Cecil family, and Robert was quickly dubbed "Will"—young "Will," as opposed to old "Will," his father. Burghley wanted a son named "Will" and Robert, to please him, took the family name and used it as a pseudonym. Thus it occurred that when the earlier writings appeared under the initials of "W. S." it was only natural that some might have identified the initials with the personality of Shakespere the actor. What first was purely a coincidence later grew into an actual business relationship between Cecil and Shakespere.

Robert Cecil was deformed from birth, having a curvature of the spine, and having such an awkward walk that he was called "an apparition of ill." It was for this reason when Robert began "nipping" the writings of other writers of the day, and thus inaugurated the remarkable War of the Poets that raged in London for more than a decade, that Robert was assailed by jealous contemporaries as Cri-spinas (Cripple-

spine) and as "The Poet Ape," for the reason that he resembled a "monkey," an "elph" or "elf," because of his deformed appearance. Elizabeth called him her "elf," a relatively pleasant term, for she liked her "little man." But his enemies were not so temperate and kindly—they called him an "ape."

Contemporary playwrights and poets well knew who it was that was writing under the name of Shakespere and others. But as Cecil worked under cover, so did those who attacked him work under cover. Cecil was Prime Minister and he could not be assailed directly by name, for that would have been dangerous. Ben Jonson and Marsden went too far in their "Eastward Ho!" and were promptly lodged in Fleet prison, and only got out by writing Cecil that they would be good and would not slam at his honesty again. Cecil was very touchy on the point of personal honor. He could not object to being called an "ape"—though it made him wince—for he WAS guilty of recklessly cribbing the writings of his contemporaries—rewriting and redressing them—"making new what was already old," as he described it. But in "Eastward Ho!" the authors went too far, as they insinuated that Cecil was selling titles to put money in his own and James' pockets.

The sonnets are examples of anagram writing. They are trick poems and nothing else. Cecil declares that his name is in almost every line of the sonnets and so it is. The sonnets constitute the greatest feat in mental gymnastics ever performed by man. Cecil's name is also trade-marked over all his dramas.

Cecil and Francis Bacon were first cousins, their mothers being sisters.

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